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ABSTRACT

The majority of critics of religious broadcasting, the so-called "electronic church," are members of the "liberal" or ecumenical Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups. In a historical context, however, these critics, along with the major radio and television networks, are as responsible for the electronic church as are the conservative churches most often accused of forming this kind of broadcasting. The break between ecumenical and evangelical religious broadcasting can be attributed to a failure of the evangelical churches to present a united front in the early days of radio until long after the ecumenical churches, united in the Federal Council of Churches of Christ (FCCC), had begun cooperating with commercial radio networks. These individual churches were forced to raise funds on the air with which to purchase air time. The ecumenical groups were also to blame by ensuring that the evangelicals received no free air time. They also tended to stereotype the evangelicals as racketeers, an image still deeply ingrained. Ultimately, the split between ecumenical and evangelical broadcasting was caused by each group's different view of the nature and purpose of the church--spiritual versus social. In view of the history of religious broadcasting, it is easy to see why the electronic church has evolved. (HTH)

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THE ELECTRONIC CHURCH DEBATE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SPLIT BETWEEN ECUMENICAL AND EVANGELICAL/INDEPENDENT RELIGIOUS BROADCASTERS

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The Electronic Church Debate in Historical Perspective: An Analysis of the Split Between Ecumenical and Evangelical/Independent Religious Broadcasters*

Probably no religious subject has received so much attention in recent years as has religious broadcasting. Under the code name "electronic church" which was coined by National Religious Broadcasters' executive director Ben Armstrong, religious broadcasting has been analyzed--and, for the most part, criticized--by such divergent publications as The Wall Street Journal,[1] Playboy,[2] and TV Guide,[3] It has been the major topic of interest in at least two recent church consultations.[4] The electronic church has been of particular interest in the 1980 presidential election because some of the most influential electric preachers have been outspoken about their religio-socio-political views regarding the condition of the country and have claimed at least some credit for dethroning President Jimmy Carter and key liberal U.S. senators.

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Many of the criticisms of the electronic church have been discussed fully elsewhere.[5] Some of these include the tendency of religious broadcasting to replace rather than complement the local church, to use simplistic approaches to solving complex human problems, to drain away funds from local churches, and so forth. What seems to have escaped attention is the question of who is criticizing the "electric church" and why they are leveling these criticisms. Some of the critics have been members of the press[6] or disaffected former employees,[7] but the majority of critics are members of the "liberal" or ecumenical Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish groups. The purpose of this paper is to provide an historical context for a discussion of criticisms of the electronic church. The focus here will be on the split between the ecumenical and evangelical/independent Protestant religious broadcasters in the early period of broadcasting--the early 1920s through the mid-1940s. The position of Catholic and Jewish groups is similar to that of the ecumenical Protestant groups, so little space will be devoted to these groups. Though the liberal and conservative Protestant groups are the main players on this stage, other individuals, media institutions as well as the government were all involved in setting the stage for the split. An attempt will be made to provide a more comprehensive explanation for the split than is currently available.

The data will be analyzed in chronological order. The early history of religious broadcasting can be divided roughly into four periods. The first period (1920 - 1926) was characterized by establishing religious broadcasting on local stations. Establishing ecumenical religious

broadcasting on national radio networks was the major characteristic of the period from 1926 to 1928. In the next period (1928 - 1941) evangelical/independent religious groups worked to secure a place in network broadcasting. The final phase (1941 - 1944) can be characterized by the formal rift between liberal and conservative religious broadcasters.

It is a major thesis of this paper that the major radio and television networks and the Protestant councils of churches are as responsible for forming the electric church as are the conservative groups who are most often accused of establishing the electric church.

Localism in Religious Broadcasting

Religion has been an important element of broadcasting since its inception in the early twentieth century. Reginald Fessenden made history in 1906 by broadcasting the first signal to carry a human voice. This broadcast was a Christmas eve message which included a Scripture reading from the Gospel According to St. Luke, a violin solo of "O Holy Night," and a vocal solo of "Largo". But it was another fifteen years before radio was developed as a truly mass medium and before religion was officially introduced as an important element in broadcasting. Station KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is usually credited with initiating religious broadcasting when it carried a service from Calvary Episcopal Church on January 2, 1921, though the United States Signal Corps had broadcast a church service from Trinity Church in Washington, D.C. on August 24, 1919.[8] Mainline denominations may well have taken the first service broadcast over KDKA as a portent of things to come--a Catholic and a

Jewish engineer transmitted the service from a Protestant church![9]

Churches and religious educational institutions joined the rush to obtain radio broadcasting licenses in the early and mid-1920s. The May 1922 Radio Service Bulletin issued by the Bureau of Navigation of the U.S. Department of Commerce lists seven stations with ties to religious bodies.[10] The number of church owned stations grew to 63 by 1925.[11] Many of these stations broadcast only on Sundays and their fare included primarily church services. Many church groups simply considered the radio as an extension of the local church, but at least one early religious broadcaster, R.R. Brown of the Omaha (Nebraska) Gospel Tabernacle, formed what he called the World Radio Congregation, complete with official membership cards.[12] Others cautioned against substituting the radio church for the traditional church:

> For shut-ins and those who are inaccessible to regular public religious services the radio service may bring a modicum of blessing, but the inclination of some to substitute this for the sanctuary is the first stage of a disease that might be termed radioreligionitis.[13]

Religious and educational institutions holding broadcast licenses were dealt a serious blow on May 15, 1923, when the Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover allocated many of them to one dial position (360 meters) which could serve only local areas intermittently, while giving large corporations more favorable frequencies.[14] With increasing spectrum crowding, commercial stations put pressure on religious and educational stations to sell out. The number of religious stations decreased from approximately sixty in 1928 to thirty in 1933.[15]

On the other hand, many early religious broadcasters produced programs to be played on stations they did not own. Well-known broadcasters among evangelicals/fundamentalists include R.R. Brown (Radio Chapel Service), Paul Rader (Chicago Gospel Tabernacle), Walter Maier (The Lutheran Hour), Charles Fuller (Old Fashioned Revival Hour), and many others. Mainline Protestant churches were also involved in broadcasting. The first airing of church services in New York City began in January, 1922 from Christ Fpiscopal Church in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. In 1923 under the auspices of the Radio Office of the Greater New York Federation of Churches, Frank Goodman started three religious radio programs. That same year the Federation sponsored the National Radio Pulpit featuring Dr. S. Parkes Cadman. Mainline churches emphasized cooperative, interdenominational programs, while the fundamentalists/evangelicals worked more independently.

Three additional features of this period need to be discussed to understand the development of religious broadcasting. Commercial broadcasting (as we know it today) was relatively rare. When American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) put station WEAF on the air in 1922, it signed cross-licensing agreements with radio equipment manufacturers (Westinghouse and General Electric) that it interpreted as giving it sole rights to what was then called "toll broadcasting." Selling time to advertisers did not become a widespread practice until 1920. Barnouw points out that stations began selling time in 1924 and that WJR in Detroit had several commercial religious programs in 1926 and found "Sunday to be especially profitable."[16] However, most of the time for religious broadcasting in

this early period was sustaining, or non-sponsored.

It is also important to understand the religious milieu of the early 1920s. The Federal Councial of Churches of Christ in America (FCCC) was gaining influence in its attempts to improve cooperation between American churches. Established in 1908, the FCCC

> emerged out of two powerful ideals in late nineteenth century American Protestantism: those of social service and inter-denominational cooperation. In bringing these two concepts together and giving them institutional form, the founders hoped that the evangelistic efforts of the Protestant churches would find new relevance...The solution to society's ills lay in "Christianizing the social order," transmutting present institutions based on the premise of human greed into ones rooted in love and cooperation.[17]

Though realism gradually replaced early optimism, the FCCC still remained committed to cooperative efforts, on all fronts, whether governmental or religious. On the other hand, fundamentalist Protestant groups rallied around the literal interpretation of the Bible as their basic doctrine. They stressed personal salvation and rejected the ecumenical and social emphases of the FCCC.

In contrast to the cooperation stressed by the FCCC, there was a good deal of strife in American Protestantism. Increasing acceptance of the theory of evolution (and of the validity of scientific discoveries in general) and the spread of the higher criticism view of the Bible provided a double-barreled threat to the traditional belief in the literal interpretation of Scripture. Fundamentalists fought back, preaching anti-modernist sermons and championing their view of Scripture in the famous Scopes trial in Tennessee over evolution in 1925. This conflict broke into the broadcasting arena. For example, the Rev. Charles Potter, pastor

of the West Side Unitarian Church in New York City attempted to broadcast his modernist Bible class in 1927, but he claimed that fundamentalists were trying to block his plans and vowed to start his own radio station to get across his views if necessary.[18]

The earliest period of religious broadcasting can be characterized by localism and by religious institutional cooperation on one hand and theological conflict on the other.

Ecumenical Religious Broadcasting on Networks

During the period 1926 - 1928, the emphasis in religious broadcasting shifted from local churches to ecumenical groups' broadcasting over networks.

In agreements signed in 1926, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) acquired the broadcasting facilities of the AT&T and formally initiated the concept of broadcast networks. RCA's newly formed subsidiary, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), operated the radio stations.

Religious programs became an important part of NBC's schedule from the outset. Since NBC was the first broadcasting network and set policies regarding religious broadcasts that were eventually adopted by other networks, it is useful to discuss in depth these policies and the reasons why they were formed.

NBC's religious programming policy originated from two sources. It inherited AT&T's policy when it took over AT&T's network in 1926. NBC also formed a Religious Advisory Council, composed of Dr. Charles McFarland (representing the FCCC), Morgan O'Brien (representing Catholic groups), and Julius Rosenwald (representing Jewish groups), to advise it on religious broadcasting.

NBC stipulated that it would only accept radio programs from central or national agencies representing the major religious faiths. NBC had actually adopted a policy first established by AT&T. The author of an early article on religious broadcasting in Radio Broadcast speculates that AT&T saw that every religious group had the right to broadcast but that all churches and religious groups could not obtain their own stations or gain access on stations owned by others; AT&T therefore gave control of religious broadcasts to the Greater New York Federation of Churches, a Protestant group that represented numerous denominations.[20] This policy overlooked the desire of individual churches and small group movements to broadcast their views.

Fifteen years later, an NBC executive explained NBC's policy:

> Since it was necessary to place responsibility with some one group, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America had been chosen among the Protestant groups when religious broadcasting was inaugurated, because it was most nearly representative and was the only equipped and ready to take over the work[21]

NBC turned over control of its religious broadcasts to the Greater New York Federation of Churches in the late 1920s and to the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in 1934 when the network became nationwide.

A rather significant relationship developed between the FCCC and NBC. Partially to strengthen its position and to minimize public concerns over monopolistic practices in radio and partly to head off any government interferences, NBC formed an Advisory Council comprised of "citizens, to which appeals can be carried over the heads of the operating executives."[22] The council included such luminaries as the presidents of the American

Federation of Labor, Carnegie Foundation, Sears, Roebuck & Company, Westinghouse Company, Elihu Root (former distinguished Secretary of State under President Theodore Roosevelt), and Dr. Charles McFarland (general secretary of the FCCC). Barnouw concludes that the Council had little impact on the way NBC did business:

> There is no indication that any citizen ever appealed to this Advisory Council "over the heads of the operating executives." Perhaps few knew where to reach it, or even that it existed. Management apparently did not make a practice of relaying complaints to it.[23]

At the Council's second annual meeting in 1928, members praised NBC for its distinguished public service. "Dr. McFarland said that religious leaders had found the company invariably 'fair, just, and wise'."[24] It is clear that NBC relied on the FCCC to lend it legitimacy, and the FCCC, in conjunction with the Greater New York Federation of Churches, depended on NBC for free air time.

The NBC policy also stated that the broadcasts were to be non-sectarian and non-denominational in appeal. The fact that NBC accepted the basic tenets of the ecumenical movement of the 1920s is evident in a statement made by NBC president Merlin H. Aylesworth in 1928:

> His (radio clergyman's) creed is of no import: but his views shall be of the broad views of tolerance, and he shall represent the best of religious thought which the experience of twenty centuries has to offer...we aim always to sow the seeds of tolerance, for radio knows no caste, no creed, no sect. The microphones of the National Broadcasting Company are at all times available to Jew, Roman Catholic and to Protestant alike, to the end that all the petty and bigoted religious differences might be forever obliterated--differences which, if unchecked, might one day threaten the very tap-roots of our national structure.[25]

This view of religious broadcasting was held by groups other than NBC and ecumenical religious leaders. For example, the New York Times placed its stamp of approval on this policy:

> Messages must, of course, be of a non-controversial nature and the music such as would be acceptable to audiences of various religious faiths. Out of this experience should grow a new type of religious ministry, non-denominational in character, emphasizing what is common to all faiths, for extreme doctrinal preachings would provoke complaint and disuse of the broadcasting. Individual churches may have their own theological wave lengths--if there are any left for assignment--but this great system of broadcasting must be free from bias or proselyting purpose. It should for that reason exert a wholesome influence in bringing those of varying creeds together in the fight for social righteousness against the powers of darkness.[26]

The third and fourth policy guidelines were extensions of the second. Religious broadcasts were to have a wide appeal, edifying individuals as well as popularizing religion and the church. Furthermore, religious broadcasts should "interpret religion at its highest and best" to educate people about their responsibilities to the organized church and society.

In addition to these official policy guidelines set down by NBC, others were also formulated. Upon the recommendation of its National Religious Advisory Council, NBC stipulated that religious groups should be given free time but that they should pay for production costs.[27] As was stated earlier, the majority of radio programs in the 1920s were carried on a sustaining basis. As a matter of fact, as late as 1931, only 33% of NBC's programming was commercially sponsored and only 22% of Columbia Broadcasting System's (CBS) programming was sponsored.[28] However, these sponsored programs generated enough revenue to pay for the sustaining programs. In spite of NBC's substantial commitment to sustaining programming, there was still a great deal of resistence to commercialism of radio in the 1920s, and these attitudes regarding

commercialization carried over into the policy regarding religious broadcasting. Of all topics, religion should not be tainted with crass commercialism.

Two other arguments were used to support NBC's policy of providing sustaining time for religious programs. First, according to Dr. William Fore, chairman of the Communications Commission of the National Council of Churches,

> The NBC policy was to not sell time for religious broadcasting since "such a course might result in a disproportionate representation of those individuals or groups who chance to command the largest purses."[29]

Second, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) and later the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) accepted, though they did not formally adopt, the industry's general view that religious programming should be provided free as a public service.[30] However, the regulatory agencies have never ruled that stations must carry religious programming on a sustaining basis exclusively.

According to Fore, another NBC policy was that only one radio preacher should be used to provide continuity.[31] NBC followed this policy at first by using Dr. S. Parkes Cadman as speaker on the National Radio Pulpit. However, by 1929 nearly 270 clergymen from twenty Protestant denominations participated in 531 religious programs over NBC.[32] Finally NBC stated that religious broadcasts were to use a preaching format, a practice that was to come under criticism in later years.[33]

The Struggle for Air Time

NBC formed the first radio network and at the same time initiated network religious broadcasting. Its religious broadcasting policy served as a useful guide for the network but initiated a decade or more of controversy in religious broadcasting. Probably no statement more accurately predicted what was to happen in the 1930s than one quoted by the Rev. Dr. Walter Maier (Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod) and attributed to the general secretary of the Federal Council of Churches in 1929:

> In the future, no denomination or individual church will be able to secure any time whatever on the air unless they are willing to pay prohibitively high prices.[34]

With the growth of radio--and religious radio--in the late 1920s--it quickly became obvious that there was room for more networks. In January 1927, United Independent Broadcasters was formed to syndicate program talent. Columbia Broadcasting System emerged from this fledgling network and, under the presidency of William Paley, turned a profit in 1929.

Unlike NBC, CBS had no well-defined religious programming policy at the outset. In the late 1920s, religious groups not affiliated with the FCCC began looking for network outlets for their programs. Some sought time on the newly established CBS network. In 1928, Presbyterian minister Donald Grey Barnhouse of Philadelphia became the first independent religious broadcaster to purchase network time on CBS for his Sunday evening vespers program.[35] In 1930, Paul Rader of the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle began airing his daily, one-hour program "Breakfast Brigade" over CBS in 1930. By 1930 CBS had little time left to sell to

religious groups but sold its last time slot to The Lutheran Hour which featured Dr. Maier. CBS' greatest religious star--and its greatest liability--also signed on in 1930. Until then, Father Charles E. Coughlin of Detroit was a midwestern phenomenon, but within a year after he began broadcasting on CBS he had an estimated audience of 45 million.[36] He inveighed against communism, monetary standards, and those with wealth and power. His bitter attacks on President Herbert Hoover and international bankers incurred the wrath of CBS, which required Coughlin to submit scripts in the future. The following week (January 4, 1931) Coughlin asked his listeners to write CBS if they disapproved its censorship. CBS was innundated with 1,250,000 million letters from listeners, most of which supported Father Coughlin.[37] CBS had already begun to set up a religious programming policy similar to that of NBC, and Father Coughlin's tactics provided CBS the opportunity it needed to implement the policy. Coughlin's broadcasts on the network were terminated in April 1931. The Lutheran Hour was discontinued in 1931 because of lack of finances and because of the new CBS policy, and the Sunday evening vespers service with Donald Grey Barnhouse continued on CBS until 1932. CBS replaced the independent broadcasters with Church of the Air, a series which featured representatives of the three major faiths on a rotating basis.

CBS President William Paley provided useful insights into the reasoning behind the network's new religious programming policy:

> In adopting the new plan of religious broadcasts, we have uppermost in mind freeing ourselves from the responsibility which we are not qualified to assume of allotting time on a commercial basis to different religions and different preachers. So long as we view this question solely in the light of business practice, we are likely to fail to give to the radio audience the balanced religious

> broadcasting it is entitled to. We feel that religious broadcasting is a public service which should be administered as far as possible under the guidance of persons closely associated with religious endeavor and definitely capable of handling such broadcasting in the public interest.[38]

Contrary to what one might have expected, independent religious broadcasting did not fade away--it continued to grow. Independents chose one of two network outlets. Some of the broadcasters switched to the newly formed Mutual Broadcasting system. Mutual began in 1934 as a loose association of four stations (WGN in Chicago, WOR in New York, WXYZ in Detroit, and WLW in Cincinnati) and gradually added many small stations not affiliated with NBC and CBS and absorbed a number of small regional networks. The new network needed programming, and independent religious broadcasters were quick to respond. Father Coughlin's program and The Lutheran Hour were two of the most notable religious broadcasts which switched from CBS to Mutual. However, the majority of independent religious broadcasters formed their own broadcasting networks by buying time on local stations. Some of these, such as Daniel Fuller of the Old Fashioned Revival Hour and Harry Schultze of the Back to God Hour, first formed their own networks then later joined Mutual. But most of the broadcasts were aired on private networks; some of these included Radio Bible Class, Back to the Bible, Haven of Rest, and Heaven and Home Hour.

While independent broadcasters were buying time on existent networks or were building their own networks, the FCCC continued to channel its programs through sustaining time made available by NBC. Though there never was a formal relationship between the FCCC and CBS, CBS did use FCCC's services in obtaining speakers for its Church of the Air programs. It

should be noted here that FCCC had broader concerns than simply obtaining air time for religious broadcasts. The Council also brought pressure to bear on radio stations to make sure they were serving the public and on the government to refrain from censorship.[39]

There were indications in the 1930s that the FCCC did not have as firm a grip on broadcasting by denominational groups as it might have appeared. Many denominations did not belong to the Council, and at least two--the Luthern Church-Missouri Synod (The Luthern Hour) and the Christian Reform Church (Back to God Hour)--broke rank early and established their own programs and networks. But late in the 1930s and early in the 1940s FCCC member denominations began establishing their own broadcasting departments. They were led by the United Presbyterian Church (1930s), Presbyterian Church-US (1945), Southern Baptist Convention (1948), and United Church of Christ (1944). However, these churches either distributed their programs through and/or cooperated closely with the independent Joint Religious Radio Committee and later the Protestant Radio Commission of the FCCC.[40]

Ellens provides an insightful summary of religious broadcasting in the late 1920s and 1930s.

> There were virtues and vices in the NBC-FCCC combine. Broadcasting by local churches, as well as independent and denominational religious broadcasting, felt the influence of practices devised and policies hammered out in New York. The network increasingly coming to influence local station program schedules. NBC allocated its free public service time exclusively to FCCC programs, leaving its local affiliate stations with a limited amount of public service time for local religious programs. Consequently, many local, denomination, and independent religious broadcasters had no alternative but to purchase time on the air...the idea of national broadcasting by denominations...began to take form, prompted by the desire for more denominational control of programs content and more variation in program format. ... many of the denominations

But the FCC pledged to make sure that broadcasters cooperated with educational, religious, and labor groups. Representatives of mainline Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish religious groups testified in favor of maintaining the status quo.[44]

Another important event was the revision of the NAB code of ethics in 1939. Formed in 1923, the NAB first concerned itself with representing broadcasters in struggles with music licensing associations and with governmental regulatory agencies. However, it became evident that one of the best ways to minimize government interference in broadcasting was for the broadcasting industry to police itself. The first code of ethics was adopted by the NAB in 1928. It reminded broadcasters that they served a diverse audience and should avoid offending public sensibilities.[45] The code was rewritten in 1935 and again reminded broadcasters not to broadcast material that was offensive to the public or contained derogatory statements against individuals or groups. Brown speculates that these provisions of the code were direct at Father Coughlin and Judge J.F. Rutherford (of the Jehovah's Witnesses).[46] The code was revised in 1939. An early draft of the revisions included, among other things, recommendations that a well-balanced series of religious programs designed to meet community needs replace all commercial religious programs. It also recommended that there should be no commercial sponsorship for programs discussing controversial issues. At least one commercial religious broadcaster--the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod--objected to the proposed provisions.[47] NAB members passed a less controversial statement on religious broadcasting:

> Radio, which reaches men of all creeds and races simultaneously, may not be used to convey attacks upon another's race or religion. Rather it should be the purpose of the religious broadcast to promote the spiritual harmony and understanding of mankind and to administer broadly to the varied religious needs of the community.[48]

This provision appeared to be designed to silence the attacks of Judge Rutherford. The statement on the treatment of controversial issues was designed to silence Father Coughlin,[49] but only achieved limited success in doing so.

The Independents Organize

In the 1940s, the focus in the conflict between ecumenical and evangelical/independent broadcasters shifted away from the FCCC, national networks and the NAB to an organization with a seemingly innocuous title--Institute for Education by Radio. But it was the work of this institute that led to the formal rift between the two major groups of religious broadcasters.

The Institute for Education by Radio (IER) was organized by the College of Education at Ohio State University in 1930. Each year, the institute brought together representatives from educational groups, educational broadcasters, radio networks, and religious broadcasters to discuss educational uses of broadcasting. Representatives of the National Committee on Education by Radio (composed of educators who advocated a commitment to independent educational radio stations) and the National Advisory Council on Education in Radio (comprised of industry representatives devoted to giving education a prominent place in commercial broadcasting) attended these institutes. The Institute had an interest in religious

broadcasting from the outset. The 1931 edition of Education on the Air, the Institute's annual report, listed the amount of time educational stations devoted to religious broadcasts.[51] The 1932 report discussed the results of a fairly comprehensive nationwide survey of religious broadcasting on commercial stations.[52]

In 1941, the Institute invited the networks, religious groups (FCCC, National Council of Catholic Men, an unnamed Jewish group, National Conference of Christians and Jews, as well as at least one representative of evangelical religious broadcasters), and educators to discuss the use of broadcasting in religious education. The representative of the Catholic group suggested standards for religious broadcasts produced by state councils of churches.[53] Statements of standards were presented for both religious programmers and station managers. These standards clearly reflected the philosophy of religious broadcasting espoused by the ecumenical groups (free time for religious broadcasts, non-sectarian messages, cooperation with the council of churches, and so forth) and by the NAB (no attacks on other religious groups). Evangelicals were also allowed to express their views. The participants agreed to survey broadcasters nationally regarding standards for religious broadcasting.

Participants in the Institute's consultation on religious broadcasting in 1942 drew up a list of proposed recommendations for religious programs.[54] It is useful to look at these recommendations and the discussion surrounding them.

> Recommendation 1--That religious programs intended for the listening of individuals of differing or no religious faith should be addressed without dilution of doctrinal teaching to the understanding of that public.

The original wording of this recommendation stated that programs should be addressed to a cross-section of the public, but some participants cautioned against lowering programs to the least common denominator. Interestingly, the compromise wording finally adopted was drafted by a Mr. Lindquist of Moody Bible Institute, an institution that pioneered evangelical broadcasting.

> Recommendation 2--That religious programs should not attack religious teachings of other faiths. When religious doctrines are expounded on the air the presentation should be affirmative.

There was little discussion on this recommendation.

> Recommendation 3--That the broadcasting of religious programs should be provided by radio stations in keeping with their responsibility to serve the "public interest, convenience, and necessity." Religious programs, like educational broadcasts, should be presented, wherever possible, on a sustaining basis without payment for time.

This recommendation generated a good deal of debate. A Catholic representative summarized many of the arguments in favor of sustaining time: (1) Religious broadcasting was part of the broadcaster's public service and should not be sponsored, (2) Religious programs have nothing to sell, (3) Money becomes the criteria for accepting or rejecting religious programs, (4) Commercial religious broadcasting necessitates appeals for money which leads to "rackets", while such appeals can be avoided with sustaining programs. J. Elwin Wright, representing the fledgling National Associaion of Evangelicals for United Action, objected to a ban on all commercial religious broadcasting. As a compromise, the words "wherever possible" were inserted in the statement.

> Recommendation 4--That time available be allocated by networks or local station management in co-operation with advisory committees from the various faiths, in order to ensure fair

> treatment of the various religious bodies seeking representation on the air. Also, that time for religion on the air should be provided in accordance with (a) the merit of the program for which time is sought; and (b) the numerical strength of the various religious faiths within the service area of the networks or local stations.

There was little disagreement with this provision.

> Recommendation 5--That regular religious radio programs should not appeal for contributions either directly or indirectly for the support of the radio program itself. Nor should a charge for sermons, pamphlets, or religious objects, distributed through religious programs, be used by the sponsor as a means of raising funds.

Three evangelical representatives objected to this recommendation. J. Elwin Wright admitted there was some racketeering in religious broadcasting but opposed a total ban on fund-raising. The recommendations passed over the objections of Wright, Lundquist and a Mr. Stewart.

> Recommendation 6--That religious broadcasts, in wartime as well as in peacetime, should not only avoid stirring up hatred against human beings of any race, nation, or creed, but should seek to contribute to the understanding and good will which are basic to a just and durable peace among the peoples of the world.

There was no opposition to this recommendation.

The ecumenical religious groups and network representatives agreed with all six recommendations. Evangelical representatives brought about substantive changes to the first and third recommendations, but refused to accept the fifth recommendation. It should be noted that neither the Institute nor the participants had the authority or power to enforce the recommendations--compliance was voluntary. The recommendations reflected the views of the networks and ecumenical groups before joining the consultation; they had been unable to stop commercial religious broadcasting in the previous fourteen years. Few local stations were signatories to these guidelines.

That same year, Mutual threatened to restrict religious broadcasting to Sunday morning and to ban all fund-raising appeals on the programs. This threat coupled with the recommendations from IER motivated the evangilical broadcasters to band together. Evangelical leaders met in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1942 to explore areas of cooperation and laid the groundwork for what was to become the National Association of Evangelicals for United Action, a name that was later shortened to National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). At its constitutional convention in May 1943, NAE leaders claimed the FCCC did not represent all Christian groups, thus a new organization was needed to fill that need.[55] One of the major complaints that motivated evangelical groups to cooperate was that the ecumenical groups had denied them air time for religious broadcasts. Evangelical leaders had obtained from promises from the networks to consider them for sustaining time if they would organize and if they demonstrated that they represented a substantial number of Protestants.

NAE realized it could not devote as much energy and attention to evangelical religious broadcasting as was needed, so it invited evangelical religious broadcasters to a special convention in 1944. The National Religious Broadcasters was formed to represent the interests of these broadcasters. NRB never did obtain time on the major networks for its members. Many established their own networks. To counter criticisms of racketeering by its members, NRB quickly established a code of ethics.

The history of the relationship between FCCC (later the National Council of Churches of Christ) and the NRB from the mid-1940s until the present is beyond the scope of this paper. There have been few attempts

to coordinate activities of two organizations. Intentionally or unintentionally, both organizations have caused harm to the other.

Analysis of the Rift

The sharp break between ecumenical and evangelical religious broadcaster can be attributed to a number of failures of both parties. As for the evangelicals, their primary failure was waiting so long to unite. They did not present a united front until twenty years after ecumenical groups began cooperating with stations and networks. When they united, they did so for a negative reason (perceived threat from the FCCC) rather than for a positive reason (cooperation). This action further polarized religious groups. Had evangelicals/independents united earlier, they might have been able to secure time on commercial networks. By approaching stations and networks on an individual basis, they created an impression that they were small religious groups, hence were not representative of the public at large and were not qualified for public service time. Furthermore, it took evangelical groups a decade or more to begin to take action on the racketeering charge, but by that time the impression had been so deeply ingrained that it still exists today. Most programs were listener-supported, and there appear to be few creative and imaginative attempts to raise money by other means. For example, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen was such an effective communicator that networks paid him to preach on their programs, and he donated all proceeds (estimated at nearly $10 million) to foreign missionary work to avoid accusations that he was enriching himself. The Archbishop summed up his philosophy:

> Nothing ever came to me. When we preach the gospel our hands have to be very clean of money--receiving it and making it, however much we argue that we need it for our expenses and expansion of our facilities. The power of preaching the gospel belongs to Him and therefore the proceeds belong to Him.[56]

Evangelicals also failed to build on the points of agreement with ecumenical groups and chose rather to emphasize disagreement. For example, evangelical representatives won substantive concessions on two of the three controversial recommendations at IER in 1942 but overlooked these in the face of the one recommendation they could not accept. Finally, independent/evangelical broadcasters were unable to appeal to a broad cross-section of the public. They tended to promote the interests of their own groups and too frequently attacked those they did not agree with.

Ecumenical groups also contributed substantially to misunderstandings between the groups. By establishing a cozy, self-serving relationship with NBC and the other networks, the FCCC helped to further isolate evangelical groups and demonstrated a good deal of intolerance toward them. Ironically, one of the basic purposes of the ecumenical groups was to reduce intolerance! A second failure of the FCCC and related groups was that they placed the evangelicals in a Cach-22 situation. They were largely (though not totally) responsible for making sure that evangelical/independent groups did not receive free time on the networks. Thus, the independent broadcasters were forced to buy time on networks and local stations, and their major means of fund-raising was their programs. Then the ecumenical groups accused independents of being racketeers and hucksters. Independent groups were clearly in a no-win situation. Another problem that arose was that ecumenical groups tended to stereotype independent/evangelical broadcasters

as hucksters and racketeers. Admittedly, there were independents who seemed to be more interested in building their own purses, power and prestige than in meeting people's personal and social needs, but many others had pure motives. No definition was given on what constituted a racketeer or huckster. No list of racketeers and hucksters was available.

There were other players on this stage--the NAB, the FCC, the networks, the Institute for Education by Radio, the National Committee on Education by Radio, and the National Advisory Council on Education in Radio--who contributed to conflicts between the ecumenical and evangelical/independent broadcasters. But it was the major religious groups who were responsible for the lack of cooperation between themselves.

Conclusion

It was stated at the outset of this paper that current criticism of the electric church can be better understood when studied within a broader historical context of the conflict between ecumenical and evangelical/independent religious groups. This paper has dealt with differences between the two groups regarding their views of the nature of the church. Evangelical groups emphasize personal salvation and believe that the church exists to spread the good news of salvation. Once the spiritual problems have been solved then one can concentrate on solving social problems. To the evangelical, greater emphasis should be placed on spiritual, rather than institutional, unity of Christians. On the other hand, ecumenical groups place far greater emphasis on social, rather than individual

salvation. Thus, there is greater emphasis on solving social problems--inequality among ethnic groups, injustice, and so forth. Furthermore, ecumenical groups place unity and cooperation among churches high on their lists of priorities.

Differences between evangelicals' and ecumenicists' view of the church and its mission are reflected in their views of the nature and purpose of religious broadcasting. Evangelicals view religious broadcasting as a means of persuading people to accept salvation through Christ and as a means of helping Christians mature in their relationship with Christ. Ecumenical groups tend to see religious broadcasting as a means of uniting Christians and of making them aware of social ills that need to be corrected. They emphasize those elements that are common among most religious groups rather than stress points of disagreement.

These differences in view of the church and religious broadcasting are fundamental and must be taken into consideration when evaluating the debate over the electric church. Some of the disagreements over the merit of the electric church can be traced to differences in views regarding the nature and mission of the church.

Some of the criticisms of the electric church can also be traced to problems which had their origins in the early conflict between evangelicals and ecumenists. For example, religious broadcasters are castigated for engaging in extensive fund-raising on the air. This paper has explained how and why evangelical/independent broadcasters use this means of support. Some have accused the evangelicals/independents of bowing to the pressures of show business in producing their radio and TV programs. Since these programs are supported by the audience, it is important to produce

programs that will attract large enough audiences to have a viable support base. On the other hand, programs that are aired on a sustaining basis do not have to attract large audiences.

Above all, religious broadcasters of all persuasions need to study the history of their profession to learn how to avoid the pitfalls it presents. For example, throughout the early history of religious broadcasting, ecumenical groups virtually monopolized sustaining time made available for religion, and in the process forced evangelical/independent groups to buy time. Today, only 8% of the time devoted to religious broadcasting is free while 92% is commercially sponsored.[57] The ecumenical groups "killed the goose that laid the golden age." There are indications today that evangelical/independent groups may be following the same pattern. As the number of religious broadcasters vying for commercial time increases, the more these broadcasters are experiencing a sellers market. Television and radio stations are asking increasingly higher prices for time because broadcasters are competing for fewer time slots. The upward spiral of prices for air time may soon make it possible for only a few religious programmers to stay in business. On the other hand, if they take stock of what has happened in the past, they can make plans to avoid this problem in the future.

Another lesson that can be learned from the past is that cooperation has positive benefits and should be pursued whenever possible. There has been cooperation within the ecumenical group and cooperation within the evangelical/independent group but little cooperation between the two major groups. It should be evident from the discussion of the philosophies

of these groups that there is little hope for joint production of programs. However, there are some commonalities that can be stressed. For example, some members in both groups realize the importance of subtly conveying basic moral and spiritual truths to the public at large. The "cool" spots produced by the Mormons, Mennonites, Southern Baptists, Franciscans, and Presbyterians are evidence of this trend. This type of programming could be jointly funded and produced, even though there is little hope for join production of more overt religious programming. Another area of cooperation might be in sharing production facilities. Broadcasting equipment is extremely expensive and religious broadcasters would do well to work out equipment sharing plans.

Footnotes

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